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Epilogue of Reminiscenes

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EPILOGUE

My task is done. The tale is told. To point a moral is unnecessary. If I have succeeded in putting over my story, a moral at this point is anti-climax. The reader draws his own or is happily without one; and yet, altho it may be considered wretchedly poor taste, still it would be cowardly to keep up my sleeve the lesson I have meant to teach while trying to look innocent and pretend I had no such intention. It may be a duty courageously to nail my theses on the barn door and frankly to declare the propaganda I have had all along deep down in my heart as emanating from this study of a colored American and his family. And first, the reader must believe me when I say the narrative is honest--a simple unvarnished tale; nothing consciously concealed, nothing purposely twisted into untrue relation or exaggerated prominence to embellish a tale or beautify a character. The Grimke family, which honored me with their friendship, I have portrayed here, not in the spirit of special pleader for recognition before the high Court of America's public. They present no race problem and constitute no suspicion of a black-and-tan peril in American social life. In their own right they are, and in my mind they will always be, exponents of all that is highest and best in this Republic--a component and ineradicable element in our democratic "House of Lords," the true and only American nobility, found always on the side of the forces that "make for righteousness," a bulwark of defense against selfishness and greed, against injustice and oppression, against wickedness in high places whatever the color of its skin.

There are those on both sides the color line who persist in complaining of the Hole in the Doughnut; some that it has not an "equality" of dough, others that it is an unsightly embarrassment and ought to be "deported." In America today, our feverish mass production and mass consumption has formed a habit of "mass" thinking. We have classified and labeled mankind (save and except our own clique, of course) and are

shocked with resentment when individuals or families happen to float under our social microscope that do not conform strictly to type. Races, colors, skulls, and noses have been neatly catalogued and the proper treatment prescribed for each according to fixed rule and scientific measurement. The proper wages, salaries, occupations, and privileges; seats in public places and on common carriers, breathing spaces in parks and playgrounds, hospitals for the sick and burying places for the dead--all are blue-printed and marked off with checkerboard precision. Magnanimously all are allowed the privilege of paying taxes and getting on relief rolls, and further, there is no little concern about their future in relation to population and its effect on our vital statistics. But, being racially a group set apart by our arrangement, we are unable to conceive of them as essentially a component element of our democratic civilization. When we say "We, the people of the U.S.A." we obviously do not mean these others who haven't blue eyes and corn-colored hair, and with whom we never allow ourselves or our children to come in contact. Naturally, we expect them to pay their way, to pull their own weight in the boat, and to be humbly thankful for what they receive. But this is the White Man's Burden anyway he looks at it, and a fine proof of his superiority it is that he does not shirk it. It may be countered here that the White Man's Burden would be no heavier if he could let the Brown Man help a bit--as man to man. Among the inalienable rights that might be guaranteed us, along with Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, is this about burdens that falls naturally under the Pursuit of Happiness; it has two prongs of the same fork, namely: "Bear ye one another's burdens," and the second like unto it: Let every man bear his own burden." The combination, made in good faith, would smooth out many a wrinkle in national and international adjustments.

The desperate plight of Europe at this moment is a terrifying ob-

ject lesson to a stricken world on the havoc and madness wrought by race and class prejudice--and it can happen here. The finest civilization mankind has yet evolved, the most intelligent nation on earth can so intensify its hates and so brood over its superiority and exclusive rights in life's satisfactions as to become a maniacal fury of destruction ending in its own holocaust and obliteration of the world's most precious achievements.

Human differences, the mainspring of prejudices, are either skin-deep or environment-born. It is the height of unwisdom to turn them into dragon's teeth of devastation and ruin. No race, no class should be embittered and antagonized by being thrust outside the pale and placarded "unwanted on God's earth." The question is not what shall "We" do with the Negro, but what can and will the Negro do for his native land by loyal service and intelligent cooperation with all patriotic fellow citizens. Why not, then, table the objection to working with instead of for the brown man. Let civilization be his burden also. Let him catch on and lift wherever he has what it takes, and let not families and races be saddled with delinquencies and punished for shortcomings of prodigal sons. The individual stands in his own boots, and if he is anti-social he sins and falls as an individual. He must be punished apart, segregated, confined to protect the social organism. The American Problem, I insist, is not a race problem. It is nothing less than criminal to keep race connections to the fore. America has no race that can not be Americanized, no elements "unassimilated and unassimilable." No families that must be ghettoed and jim-crowed to preserve the pristine purity and primordial bloodstream from pollution and degradation. Vice, crime, depravity, disease bear no hallmarks of any one race, color, or creed. The social structure is so knit together and firmly riveted interdependently that when one member suffers all eventually suffer with it and thro it; and if one member be honored all the members rejoice

with it, and there is no schism in the body thus "tempered" as God would have it. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the foot, I have no need of thee. Nay, much more, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary." I Cor. 12, 21.

Now the American family, not individuals or chance groups of gangsters, hoodlums, and racketeers, holds the answer to the American Problem. The Family to the Manor born, without distinction of race, creed, or color, is built into the social structure and forms a component part of that structure. Whether its niche is "head" or "foot" another sojourner has no right to assert either tolerance or intolerance at its existence. Its credentials are incontestable. It is a bona fide "member" of the organism and, even if "feeble," still necessary to the well-being of the whole. As part to whole, therefore, every member is responsible to the limit of ability for health and growth of the social body, bound to contribute to its steady progress, gratified at its success, hurt by its shortcomings, and whole-heartedly ^{committed} by every tie and obligation to work for the realization of its ideals. It is thus I have conceived the Grimke family as worthy promoters of the advancement, not of colored people alone, but of the great principles of American Democracy; and Democracy did not mean to them a fetish to be blindly worshipped nor did their patriotism bow and kotow before every shrine pretending to carry its name. They looked upon government not as a static ideal, finished and sacro-sanct: That "whatever is, is right" and "right or wrong my country." But rather Our Country, and may God help all of us to keep it right. "America," ideally "the home of the brave and land of the free" to their mind, not perfect but perfectible, and the sacred obligation of every son and daughter, rich or poor, black or white, to do with his might what hands find and talent fits to do toward realizing the perfect State. "Right forever on the Scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne" was

just the job for the Lord's Anointed and they never shirked or whined. They neither waited supinely for Government to be their meal ticket, nor wheedled for jobs and fairy godmother handouts, nor did they agonize and beseech to propitiate the Moloch of hatred ready to devour their kind. Considering that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed and that silence may be assumed to give consent, they thot it their manifest duty to work "mouth-wise and pen-wise" to add their not uncertain note to the cry of those who do battle at Armageddon. Their verbs they conjugated mostly in the active, not the passive, voice; and conceding naught to the loftiest in the matter of loyalty and love of country, they cheerfully embraced equality of responsibility with the most powerful in the effort to bring about correctional and remedial measures.

Signature
end of Vol. I.